

News Sun, April 3, 2004

Lake County and Illinois emerged as winners in a federal transportation bill approved by the U.S. House of Representatives Friday.

Millions of dollars in funding for projects including the widening of the Route 60 bridge over the Tri-State Tollway, the widening of Washington Street near Great America and improvements to Midlothian Road at Lake Zurich High School are included in the bill.

The bill now moves to conference between the House and Senate, and should be approved in late summer or fall, officials said. The transportation package, known as TEA-3 (Transportation Equity Act) covers a six-year period.

Both U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park and U.S. Rep. Phil Crane, R-Wauconda, expressed confidence Friday that the Lake County projects will remain in the final version of the TEA-3 legislation.

The House bill passed by a vote of 357 to 65.

As it currently stands, TEA-3 would fully fund three projects in Crane's 8th District. It includes \$3.36 million for the widening of Washington Street from the entrance to Great America to Cemetery Road, \$480,000 for intersection improvements on Midlothian Road at Lake Zurich High School and \$5.16 million for the widening of Quentin Road from Lake-Cook Road to Dundee Road in Cook County.

"This funding is critical to addressing one of the top issues in our state and especially in the 8th District — improving transportation," Crane said. "Through this bill, Illinois will be getting a better return on the money it sends to Washington to fund projects that are central to improving the condition of our roads and relieving traffic congestion."

In Kirk's 10th District, the bill includes \$8 million for the widening of a serious bottleneck, the Route 60 bridge over the Tri-State Tollway in Lake Forest. Kirk said the Illinois Tollway and

Illinois Department of Transportation have committed to funding the remaining \$8 million of the project.

The bill also includes \$500,000 for an Intelligent Transportation System demonstration project on Lake-Cook Road that will include electronic information signs to alert commuters to problems and delays.

Kirk said bipartisan cooperation between leaders of the Illinois delegation helped Illinois make serious gains in federal transportation funding under the proposed legislation. If approved, Illinois would see a 28 percent increase in federal funding for road projects and a 31 percent increase in transit funding, including money to fund the start up of Metra's proposed STAR line for the western suburbs.

"Illinois was a donor state to the highway program," Kirk said of previous federal transportation packages.